

## Charter School Program Grant Guidance on Pre-School

**Early Childhood Programs:** According to the [CSP Guidance on the Use of Funds to Support Preschool Education \(December 2014\)](#), CSP funds may only be used to support Indiana preschools in charter schools that also provide at least one elementary or secondary grade during the grant period. Charter schools that serve only preschool students may not be supported by CSP funds because preschool is not part of elementary education under Indiana law. Preschool programs are not required to be included in the charter school's approved charter with their authorizer, unless it is required by the authorizer.

Early childhood education programs should be high-quality, or should demonstrate pursuit of high quality status, by participating in Indiana's [Paths to Quality \(PTQ\)](#) assessment and rating system and achieving, or working to achieve, a level 3 or 4 on the childcare quality rating and improvement system. Research shows that high-quality early childhood programs prepare children for future success through a high-quality educational environment. The PTQ system assesses and works to improve the quality of care and education.

The United States Education Department provides the following guidance ([see full document here](#)) on the definition of a high-quality early childhood education program:

*High-Quality Preschool Program means an early learning program that includes structural elements that are evidence-based and nationally recognized as important for ensuring program quality, including at a minimum—*

- (a) High staff qualifications, including a teacher with a bachelor's degree in early childhood education or a bachelor's degree in any field with a State-approved alternate pathway, which may include coursework, clinical practice, and evidence of knowledge of content and pedagogy relating to early childhood, and teaching assistants with appropriate credentials;*
- (b) High-quality professional development for all staff;*
- (c) A child-to-instructional staff ratio of no more than 10 to 1;*
- (d) A class size of no more than 20 with, at a minimum, one teacher with high staff qualifications as outlined in paragraph (a) of this definition;*
- (e) A Full-Day program;*
- (f) Inclusion of children with disabilities to ensure access to and full participation in all opportunities;*
- (g) Developmentally appropriate, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction and evidence-based curricula, and learning environments that are aligned with the State Early Learning and Development Standards, for at least the year prior to kindergarten entry;*
- (h) Individualized accommodations and supports so that all children can access and participate fully in learning activities;*
- (i) Instructional staff salaries that are comparable to the salaries of local K-12 instructional staff;*
- (j) Program evaluation to ensure continuous improvement;*

*(k) On-site or accessible Comprehensive Services for children and community partnerships that promote families' access to services that support their children's learning and development; and*  
*(l) Evidence-based health and safety standards.*

In order to meet the definition of a charter school under section 310(1) of the ESEA, the preschool or any other charter school shall not charge tuition for any students within the school for any part of the day. The school may charge reasonable curricular fees. If the school charges curricular fees, there must also be a process for students who qualify as free and reduced lunch students to be given tuition assistance for these curricular fees.

Early Childhood programs must be a site that will offer preschool or pre-kindergarten directly through the charter school, and include at least one grade in Kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. (Early Learning is defined as birth through age 8). A charter school may use their approved Charter School Program award funds to pay a third party vendor to operate a tuition-free preschool program on the school site.

Charter schools must be able to demonstrate that the pre-school and its staff are integrated into the school staff and culture, through examples just as:

- Joint Professional Development
  - Same school culture and expectations
  - Same program model
  - Co-housed in the same building/location
- Charter schools may NOT use CSP funds to pay for preschool related costs if the preschool program charges tuition.